

Written Testimony of Christopher M. Root  
Chairman, Department of Catholic Charities  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing  
On House Bills 5908 and 5909  
May 31, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify today regarding House Bills 5908 and 5909. My name is Chris Root and I am the Chairman of the Department of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Lansing.

The ability to perform charitable work in light of one's faith is a crucial component of the freedoms all Americans have historically enjoyed. These two bills will help to ensure that faith based organizations will be able to continue to enjoy this freedom while serving the most poor and vulnerable among us, children.

The Catholic Church has a long history of performing charitable work in the State of Michigan. The Diocese of Lansing, covering a ten county area of mid and southern Michigan, has been an important partner in meeting the needs of vulnerable children in Michigan. In 2004 Catholic Charities agencies in the Diocese of Lansing served 69,949 unduplicated clients. Children represented 23,375 of those we served. Of those served 39,622 receive public assistance and 47,509 live below the Federal poverty line.

Adoption services are an important component of our services. Our agencies provide coordinated social, emotional, and legal processes for children whose birth parents are unwilling or unable to provide appropriate care for them and who are or will be legally free for adoption. The services are provided for and on behalf of the child and to all parties involved, including the child, adoptive applicants, and biological families.

In 2004 we served a total of 468 persons with adoption services. Included in this number were 152 children/adolescents and 316 adults. Seventy-six of these children were placed into adoptive families. These individuals were assisted with a variety of services including: domestic adoption, special needs adoptions, services to birth parents, pre-adoptive foster care placements, post adoption services, orientation and information about adoption, recruitment and counseling for perspective adoptive families, counseling for birth parents, home studies, adoption search and reunion, individual, family and group counseling.

The Diocese of Lansing is but one of the seven Catholic Dioceses in the State of Michigan. Each of the dioceses sponsor Catholic Charities agencies. These agencies also have a long history of providing numerous charitable activities that serve the poorest and most vulnerable populations in Michigan. The motivation for all of our charitable works can be summed up by Catholic Charities USA's vision statement:

*Believing in the presence of God in our midst, we proclaim the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the person by sharing in the mission of Jesus given to the Church. To this end, Catholic Charities works with individuals, families, and communities to help them meet their needs, address their issues, eliminate oppression, and build a just and compassionate society.*

House Bills 5908 and 5909 will assure that faith based organizations can continue to be a partner in helping children by facilitating adoptions. It will insure a healthy pluralistic approach to adoption in the State of Michigan by providing children, birth parents and adoptive parents with multiple options in the adoption process.

The Diocese of Lansing urges you to support these bills and vote them favorably to the floor of the House of Representatives.

Thank you.